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AUTHOR Mayton, Dan
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ABSTRACT

The devastation of a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers would clearly change the world in catastrophic ways. The purpose of this study was to identify differences in the value priorities for individuals who spontaneously expressed a concern about nuclear war and those who did not. A written questionnaire was administered to a sample of 5,128 adolescents from grades 6 through 12 in the rural inland Northwest. This questionnaire included the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) and the Spontaneous Concern about the Nuclear Threat Scale (SCANTS). A total of 24.3 percent of the adolescents expressed concern about nuclear war on the SCANTS and the remaining 75.7 percent did not. Using the Mann-Whitney U statistic, 10 of the 18 value priorities were found to significantly differentiate the two groups. Adolescents who expressed concern about a nuclear war placed higher priorities on the social values of equality and a world at peace. Adolescents who did not express a concern about nuclear war placed higher priorities on the individual values of health, a comfortable life, self-respect, an exciting life, wisdom, mature love, pleasure, and inner harmony. The results are discussed in terms of belief system theory and theories of social cognition. The document includes one statistical table and an 11-item bibliography. (Author/JB)

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Spontaneous Concern About Nuclear War: Value Priority Differences in Adolescents

Dan Mayton

Lewis Clark State College

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Abstract

The devastation of a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers would clearly change the world in catastrophic ways. The purpose of this study was to identify differences in the value priorities for individuals who spontaneously expressed a concern about nuclear war and those who did not. A large written questionnaire was administered to a sample of 5128 adolescents from grades 6 through 12 in the rural inland northwest. This questionnaire included the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) and the Spontaneous Concern About The Nuclear Threat Scale (SCANTS). A total of 24.3% of the adolescents expressed concern about nuclear war on the SCANTS and the remaining 75.7% did not. Using the Mann-Whitney U statistic, ten of the 18 value priorities were found to significantly differentiate the two groups. Adolescents who expressed concern about a nuclear war placed higher priorities on the social values of equality and a world at peace. Adolescents who did not express a concern about nuclear war placed higher priorities on the individual values of health, a comfortable life, self-respect, an exciting life, wisdom, mature love, pleasure, and inner harmony. The results are discussed in terms of belief system theory and theories of social cognition.

The general effect of issue salience focuses attention on issue relevant thoughts, feelings, and actions (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). While this does not precipitate attitude change by itself, it does result in responses consistent with previously held thoughts, beliefs, and actions which are more extreme or intense than would otherwise have been made (Fiske, 1987). Overwhelming support for a bilateral nuclear freeze exists in the United States. So does an overwhelming lack of political involvement on this issue. Keeping the nuclear threat salient is important for profreeze and other groups in the "peace movement". Understanding the characteristics of individuals for whom the nuclear threat is salient may also be important to increase involvement in political activities concerning nuclear policy.

Assessing the salience of the threat of nuclear war ideally involves nonreactive techniques with indirect strategies of questioning. By utilizing responses to a single probe or incomplete sentence or a series of them researchers have successfully assessed the spontaneous concern about nuclear war with adolescents (e.g. Escalona, 1965; Macpherson & Meador, 1987) and college students (Elder, 1965; Mayton, 1986; Hamilton, 1987). Mayton (1986, 1987) developed the Spontaneous Concern About the Nuclear Threat Scale (SCANTS) which reliably and validly assesses the salience of the nuclear threat by providing respondents with ten opportunities to mention nuclear war as a fear or worry.

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the personal characteristics of individuals who hold the threat

of nuclear war as a salient concern or worry in their lives. This study selected differences in the value priorities as its personality variable of interest. This choice was made since values serve as standards and are general plans for conflict resolution and decision making and are central in importance in an individual's personality (Rokeach, 1973, 1979). Values also transcend attitudes, ideology, evaluations, judgments, justifications, etc. Since values are enduring beliefs that specific modes of conduct or end-states of existence are personally or socially preferable, it is hypothesized that the values of those who hold the nuclear threat as salient will differ from those who do not. More specifically, it is hypothesized that individuals hold the nuclear threat salient will place higher priorities on the value of a world at peace, national security, and other society-oriented values and lower priorities on personally-oriented values than individuals who do not find the nuclear threat a salient issue.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were 5435 adolescents from 31 different schools in north central Idaho and southeastern Washington. Except for two larger schools in the study which selected representative courses across all ability levels for the administration of the questionnaire, all students present in the school on the day of the administration were given the questionnaire to complete. Only a handful refused to do so. The number of students absent plus those refusing to complete the

questionnaire varied between 2% and 8% of the official enrollment of each school.

A total of 52.3% of the respondents were male and 47.7% were female. Caucasians made up 89.5% of the respondents with Native American Indian making up 5.0% of the sample. Asians, Blacks, and Hispanic made up the remainder of the sample. The grade breakdown of the respondents included 12.4%, 21.0%, 14.2%, 16.8%, 18.0%, and 16.8% in the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, respectively.

Design and Instrumentation

This study utilized a large 12 page written questionnaire which was administered as part of the needs assessment phase of a Drug Education Infusion Grant funded by the U. S. Department of Education. The questionnaires were anonymously administered to adolescents during school time in the spring of 1988. The items on the questionnaire assessed a range of demographic information, drug usage levels over the previous six months, attitudes towards drugs and their usage, perception of community use levels, basic knowledge about drugs, other selected risk factors and general values.

Of particular concern for this paper are the general values and the expression of concern about the threat of nuclear war. The terminal values of the respondents were assessed by the Rokeach Value Survey -Form G (RVS). The RVS requires respondents to rank 18 terminal values (end-states) according to their importance as a guiding principle in their lives. The highest value is assigned a 1, the second highest value a number 2, and

this process continues until the lowest value is assigned the number 18. The salience of the nuclear threat was assessed using Spontaneous Concern About the Nuclear Threat Scale (SCANTS). The SCANTS presents five incomplete sentences of "I worry about..." and five incomplete sentences of "One of my fears regarding the future is...". If respondents mention nuclear war or some related term for any of the ten incomplete sentences, they are classified as being concerned about the nuclear threat. If they do not provide a nuclear war related response to any of the ten incomplete sentences, they are classified as not being concerned about the nuclear threat.

RESULTS

Demographic Differences Across Nuclear Threat Salience

A total of 1250 or 24.3% of the adolescents expressed concern about nuclear war on the SCANTS and the remaining 3901 or 75.7% did not. A chi square test did not yield significant differences between males and females. A chi square test did not yield any differences for those adolescents who reported participating in sports and those who do not.

A 2 X 3 chi square test was computed assessing differences between Caucasian, Native American Indian, and the other ethnic groups represented in the sample. The Caucasian adolescents found the nuclear threat to be significantly more salient than the Native American Indian respondents and the other ethnic groups were in between these two groups.

Religiosity was assessed by a single item which asked the respondents to indicate whether they were either extremely

religious, somewhat religious, or not at all religious. A 2 X 3 chi square test identified a significant difference ($p < .005$) between levels of religiosity and the salience of the nuclear threat. Adolescents who described themselves as not at all religious mentioned the nuclear threat significantly less often than the other groups.

The educational plans or aspirations of the respondents were assessed on a six point scale from some high school, high school diploma, some college, 4 year degree, graduate school, to a doctorate. The 2 X 6 chi square test for educational plans was significant at the .001 level. The higher the educational aspirations of the adolescent the more likely they were to mention the nuclear threat. Related to educational aspirations is the achievement level of the adolescents. Each respondent was asked to indicate their average grade in school by circling the letter grade A, B, C, D, or F. A 2 X 4 chi square test was significant ($p < .001$) for educational achievement levels. Respondents who reported higher grades were more likely to mention the nuclear threat as a concern in their lives. The percentages who reported the nuclear threat to be salient to them was 28.6%, 25.5%, 22.0%, 18.5%, and 14.9% for adolescents who held an A, B, C, D, and F average, respectively.

Respondents were also asked to indicate how often they were absent from school for reasons of sickness and how many times they were absent without being sick and for nonschool related reasons. Chi square results for both variables were significant ($p < .05$). The more often the adolescents were absent whether it

was due to reasons of sickness or truancy, the less likely they were to view the nuclear threat as a salient issue in their lives.

Chi square tests were computed for current living arrangements for the adolescent respondents and their grade level in school. Respondents who indicated they were living with both parents or a parent and a stepparent were more likely to view the nuclear threat as a salient issue than adolescents who indicated living with a single parent or in some other living arrangement ($p < .025$). No significant differences were found for adolescent across grade levels and for those in junior high when compared to those in senior high.

Chi square tests did not yield significant differences between adolescents who reported varying levels of alcohol or marijuana usage. Chi square tests for tobacco usage and cocaine usage were significant with more concern for the nuclear threat expressed by the nonuser than the user of these drugs.

Value Differences Across Nuclear Threat Salience

The composite ranks for the terminal value hierarchies were determined for the nuclear threat salient group and the nuclear threat not salient group using the median rankings given by the respective group members. When the medians for any particular pair of values were equal, the means for the pair were consulted to derive the group hierarchy. The terminal value hierarchies for the two groups are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The terminal value hierarchies for adolescents who held the nuclear threat as a salient issue and those adolescents who did not appear quite similar. The composite rankings only differ by a ranking of plus or minus two ranks in all but one instance. This exception is for the society-oriented value of a world at peace which is in the upper third (6th) of the value hierarchy for adolescents who view the nuclear threat as salient and in the middle third (11th) for the nonsalient group.

Using the Man-Whitney U statistic, ten of the 18 value priorities were found to significantly differentiate the two groups. Adolescents who expressed concern about a nuclear war placed higher priorities on the social values of equality and a world at peace. Adolescents who did not express a concern about nuclear war placed higher priorities on the individual values of health, a comfortable life, self-respect, an exciting life, wisdom, mature love, pleasure, and inner harmony.

DISCUSSION

Almost one in four adolescent respondents in this expressed concern about the nuclear threat in a rural area of the country in which the presence of a clearly defined nuclear target for the Soviets is quite removed in terms of distance. The nuclear threat was found to be more salient for the adolescents who appear to be the better students in terms of average grades and in terms of educational aspirations. The notion expressed by some peace researchers that large number of our youth are experiencing despair and are not planning for the future must be tempered by these findings. In fact it was those students who

planned to go the farthest within the educational system who expressed the most concern about the nuclear threat. The finding that the adolescents who expressed concern about the nuclear threat were sick less often, were truant less often, smoked cigarettes less often, and used cocaine less often indirectly indicates that concern about the threat of nuclear war does not seem to cause debilitating stress levels which precipitate health problems or "dropping out behavior".

Higher levels of religiosity were found to be related to concern about the threat of nuclear war. This is consistent with earlier findings by Mayton (1986) for college students.

The results regarding the value differences of those adolescents concerned about the nuclear threat and those not concerned demonstrated overall value hierarchy similarities between the two groups. One of the two values expected to differentiate the two groups the most strongly did so. Adolescents who find the nuclear threat salient in their lives value a world at peace much more highly (5th) than those who do not (11th). While nine other terminal value differences were statistically significant, the actual composite ranks for the two groups were quite similar. As hypothesized, when differences did occur respondents who did not express concern about the nuclear threat tended to differ from the concerned by consistently placing higher priority on more personally-oriented values and lower priorities on the society-oriented values.

The self confrontation procedure grounded in belief system theory has been shown to be very effective in changing values and

subsequently related attitudes and behaviors (Ball-Rokeach
Rokeach, & Grube, 1984). Peace researchers need to investigat
the use of this method in changing the values, attitudes, ar
behaviors of the citizenry regarding the issue of the nuclea
threat, arms control, and related issues. This study ha
provided empirical evidence that the value of a world at peac
clearly differentiates adolescents concerned about the nuclea
threat from those who are not. Increasing the priority placed o
the value of a world at peace using the self confrontation metho
may result in attitude changes and behavior changes congruen
with the goals of the "peace movement". This current stud
implies that this type of value change research should becom
part of the agenda of peace researchers.

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Table 1

Composite Ranks for Terminal Value Hierarchies of High School Students

Terminal Value	Not Concerned About Nuclear War (n= 3122)	Concerned About Nuclear War (n= 1078)
TRUE FRIENDSHIP	1	1
HEALTH	2 *	3
FREEDOM	3	2
A COMFORTABLE LIFE	4 *	5
FAMILY SECURITY	5	4
SELF-RESPECT	6 **	7
AN EXCITING LIFE	7 ***	9
WISDOM	8 *	8
MATURE LOVE	9 ***	11
A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT	10	10
A WORLD AT PEACE	11	6 ***
PLEASURE	12 ***	12
EQUALITY	13	13 *
INNER HARMONY	14 *	15
SOCIAL RECOGNITION	15	14
SALVATION	16	18
A WORLD OF BEAUTY	17	17
NATIONAL SECURITY	18	16

Mann-Whitney U test was employed to assess differences.
* significantly higher priority at $p < .05$ level
** significantly higher priority at $p < .01$ level
*** significantly higher priority at $p < .001$ level